



Pick Your Path to Health

Fit At Every Age

Aging—you can't prevent it—but eating right and staying fit now can help to keep you feeling and looking good throughout your life. As women go through the different life stages, it is important to be aware of the bodies' changing needs. Staying active and tailoring food intake to keep up with your changing body can help minimize unwanted weight gain and energy loss and possibly keep chronic diseases in check.

In your early 20s—Lower your chances of getting osteoporosis later by consuming more calcium now. Keep your bones strong by eating two to three servings of foods that contain calcium each day. The best choices for calcium are nonfat or lowfat milk, yogurt, and cheese. One serving of milk or yogurt is 8 oz. or 1 cup; one serving of cheese is 1½ ounces.

In your late 20s—One of the most important things you can do at this stage is to make sure you are getting the recommended daily 400 micrograms of folate or folic acid, especially if you are planning a pregnancy. Folic acid is an essential B vitamin that protects fetuses from serious birth defects. Good sources of folate include green, leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, folic acid-fortified bread and cereal, and supplements.

In your 30s—A woman's metabolism slows down between 2 and 8 percent every decade, which means a 35-year-old woman needs 100 fewer calories a day than she did 10 years ago. To keep your weight steady, you will need to exercise more and eat less. It is important to remember that although you need to reduce your food intake, your body still needs nutrients. So, you may need to reexamine your diet and cut back on empty calories and eat more nutritious foods.

In your 40s and beyond—As women age, muscle mass slowly begins to deteriorate and is replaced with fat. The best way to prevent age-related muscle loss is to make strength training and weight-bearing exercise a priority. Experts recommend that women over 40 do strength training exercises, including weight or resistance training, at least twice a week, and weight bearing exercises, including swimming, walking, and dancing, at least five times a week.

At any age, exercise is one of the best things you can do for your health. The key to staying active is finding something that you enjoy that fits into

your daily schedule. It doesn't matter what you choose to do—inline skating, running, walking, dancing, household chores, or gardening—as long as you do it regularly. Experts recommend that you do 30 minutes or more of physical activity a day, at least five times a week.

The benefits of exercise are endless—exercise promotes weight control, improves your strength and flexibility, lowers your risk of heart disease, helps control blood pressure and diabetes, relieves stress, and improves your mood and the way you feel about yourself. If you are older than 40, very overweight, or have medical problems, you should see your doctor before you start exercising.

Regardless of your age, taking a little time now to change your eating and exercise habits can help improve your quality of life now and in the future, and lead you down a path of good health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."